



United States
Department of
Agriculture
Forest Service

Umatilla National Forest
2517 S.W. Hailey Avenue
Pendleton, OR 97801

Wallowa-Whitman National Forest
1550 Dewey Avenue
P.O. Box 907
Baker City, OR 97814

File Code: 2210
Date: April 10, 2009

Dear Interested Party

The Walla Walla Ranger District is beginning an environmental analysis of the proposed North End Sheep Allotment Project. This project is in the early planning stage to evaluate issues and concerns specific to this project and potential effects of the proposed action to the landscape and resource values. This letter provides preliminary information on the analysis area, purpose and need, proposed action and potential issues that will be considered. We are asking for comments and/or alternatives to the proposed action that you would like us to consider.

Location and Physical Characteristics

The North End Sheep Allotment is located in Umatilla, Wallowa, and Union Counties west and north of Elgin, Oregon (see map). The entire allotment is located within the Umatilla National Forest boundary. To the east, it borders the Grande Ronde River Valley near Elgin and Summerville, to the north it borders the breaks of the Wenaha and South Fork of the Walla Walla Rivers, and borders Thomas Creek to the west. The elevation ranges from 2,320 feet on the Umatilla River to 5,680 feet near Bone Spring. Most of the allotment ranges from 4,000 to 5,000 feet.

The North End Allotment is approximately 132,000 acres in size. The large size makes for a diverse allotment of mountain uplands and plateaus dissected by large canyons. Approximately 75% of the allotment is forested vegetation with the remaining lands consisting of grasslands.

The legal description is:

Township	Range	Section	Township	Range	Section
1 North	37 East	1-3, 10-14	3 North	40 East	2-4
1 North	38 East	1-12, 18	4 North	37 East	34-36
2 North	37 East	1-5, 9-15, 22-26, 35-36	4 North	38 East	11-36
2 North	38 East	1-23, 25-36	4 North	39 East	All
2 North	39 East	6, 7, 18	4 North	40 East	3-10, 15-23, 26-35
3 North	37 East	1-4, 8-16, 21-36	5 North	39 East	25, 32-36
3 North	38 East	All	5 North	40 East	28-33
3 North	39 East	2-10, 15-22, 27-33			



Background

Most of the allotment has been grazed by domestic sheep since the late 1800's and records show that the Forest Service has issued permits since the 1920's for the allotment. In Umatilla County (including private, State, and Federal land), sheep grazing reached a peak of 250,000 individual sheep in the 1910's. The North End Allotment has had several boundary adjustments since the 1920's. The number of sheep authorized, the size of the allotment, the number of pastures, and the rotations have all been changed over the years.

An Allotment Management Plan (AMP) has been in effect since 1986. The AMP authorizes 5,000 sheep (5 bands) on the allotment from June through September on 6 units/pastures. The Forest Service and permittee have elected to graze 3,962 sheep per year in 4 bands with the exception of a few years. As a result, only 4 units, and portions of the other units, have been used each year to allow for a deferred or rest rotation. Annual Operating Instructions (AOI)¹ for the allotment have been adjusted yearly to respond to changes in management direction.

Since the current AMP was approved in 1986, it did not incorporate the changes that have occurred since the signing of the Forest Plan (1990), as amended. Also, the Rescission Act of 1995 (*Public Law 104-19, Section 504*) requires the Forest Service to identify all allotments requiring NEPA analysis, and to prepare and adhere to a schedule for conducting such analysis.

Bighorn sheep were released in the Wenaha-Tucannon wilderness in 1983 and on state land along the Grande Ronde River in 1984. The 1986 AMP considered the presence of bighorn sheep adjacent to the allotment. The area between the allotment and the breaks of the Grande Ronde River was expected to provide an adequate separation of domestic and bighorn sheep to prevent possible contraction of disease. Since that time, many years of monitoring of bighorn sheep has occurred, several bighorn sheep have ventured into the allotment, and occasionally domestic sheep have strayed off the allotment.

Purpose and Need

The purpose and need of this analysis is to comply with the Rescission Act of 1995 requiring NEPA analysis on the North End Allotment.

Also, part of the allotment is near occupied Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep range. There is the potential for physical contact between the permitted domestic sheep and wild bighorn sheep. Contact between domestic sheep and bighorn sheep would likely be detrimental to the health of the bighorn sheep herd and could result in substantial population declines. There is a need to manage livestock stocking and distribution to reduce the likelihood of contact between domestic and bighorn sheep.

¹ A long term operating plan which is the implementing document for the decision made through the National Policy Act process that promotes progress toward desired future conditions.

Proposed Action

The Forest Service proposes to continue to permit livestock grazing (sheep) on approximately 101,000 acres within the North End Allotment. Approximately 31,000 acres of the allotment would be closed as part of this proposal (see map). A maximum of 3,962 ewe/lamb pairs would be authorized within the normal grazing season from June 1 to October 9.

Instructions for making comments

We want to be aware of and responsive to any issues, comments, or concerns you may have specific to this project. Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments will be accepted until May 15, 2009. Remember, timely comments are most helpful in the progress of the project. Written comments should be submitted to me, Mike Rassbach, District Ranger, 1415 West Rose Street, Walla Walla, WA, 99362. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are 8:00 am - 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday, excluding federal holidays. Comments can be faxed to me at (509) 522-6000. Electronic comments should be submitted as part of the actual e-mail message or as an attachment in Microsoft Word, rich text format, or portable document format only and sent to comments-pacificnorthwest-umatilla-wallawalla@fs.fed.us. If you choose to contact us by phone the number is 509-522-6290.

Please note that comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and are available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered, however, those who only submit anonymously will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR Part 215. Additionally pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27 (d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that under FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and where the request is denied, the agency will return the submission (within 10 days) and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address.

If you would like any other information about the project, please contact Kimpton Cooper, Project Team Leader, Walla Walla Ranger District, 1415 W. Rose, Walla Walla, WA 99362, phone (509) 522-6009.

Sincerely,

Michael L. Rassbach

MICHAEL L. RASSBACH
District Ranger

